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ABSTRACT

This publication discusses definitions of alternative education, outlines common program features, and lists challenges to providing quality services. The paper focuses on alternatives for students who are at risk for school failure, dropout, or delinquency. Since few studies on the effectiveness of alternative programs have been conducted and results of studies that have been performed are difficult to generalize beyond their specific settings, the report provides an outline of research on the common features found in alternative-education programs and describes a model alternative program. The text discusses special-education students and general-education students who are in need of alternative education. It details the characteristics of alternative-education programs, such as the reason for admission or attendance. It also provides descriptions of research-based, alternative-education strategies, which include a low ratio of students to teachers, highly structured classrooms with behavioral classroom management, positive rather than punitive emphasis in behavior management, and social-skills instruction. The report concludes with suggestions for establishing an alternative-education program, including tips on universal, proactive screening, on avoiding negative effects, and on obtaining support for implementing and evaluating the program. (Contains 137 references.) (RJM)

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Alternative Education Programs for At-Risk Youth:

Issues, Best Practice, and Recommendations

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R. Stalick

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Alternative Education Programs for At-Risk Youth:

Issues, Best Practice, and Recommendations

Introduction

Alternative education programs are growing in number and diversity across the United States. Education agencies are driven by the need to remove disruptive and dangerous students from classrooms without suspending or expelling them to home or the streets (Seibert, no date). Recently, some states (e.g., Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana) have required school districts to create alternative education programs for students who have been removed from their home school or cannot be served effectively there. Finally, the new amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provide guidelines for use of alternative education settings, thus stimulating development of programs.

Alternative schools vary greatly in their design, philosophy, and effectiveness (Fizzell & Raywid, 1997; Seibert, no date). As such, the unique characteristics of these programs and the diverse populations they serve have made rigorous evaluation very difficult. This paper will focus on alternatives for students who are at risk for school failure, dropout, or delinquency. Few studies on the effectiveness of alternative programs have been conducted, and results of studies that have been conducted are difficult to generalize beyond the settings in which they were conducted (Kochhar, 1998; Seibert, no date). There is evidence, however, that at-risk students served in comprehensive, well-designed alternative programs do better than predicted if they had not attended them (Morley, 1991; Raywid, 1990, 1995, 1996, 1998; Seibert, no date).

In this paper we discuss definitions of alternative education, outline common program features, and list challenges to providing quality services. Because of the scarcity of quality research on the topic, we provide an outline of research on the common features found in alternative education programs. In conclusion, we describe the features of a model alternative program and offer recommendations for program development.

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Alternative Education Programs for At-Risk Youth:
Issues, Best Practice, and Recommendations

IN THE UNITED STATES, WE HAVE A STRONG TRADITION OF VALUING the "opportunity to learn" in the public schools where "poor and minority students" may have "access to the full range of educational opportunities" (Stevens & Grymes, 1993, p. 1). In reality, access to resources in educational environments is not equally distributed (Stockard & Mayberry, 1992). For example, although vocational training that prepares students to enter the labor force directly after leaving high school may be in the best interest of some students (Bullis & Gaylord-Ross, 1991; Edgar, 1989, 1991), schools tend to focus on the college-preparatory track. Students who are unsuccessful in that track tend to leave high school early but might enter and stay in a school where alternative education strategies are used (Office of Policy and Planning, 1992).

Oregon's 1999 Benchmark Performance Report gives the state failing grades in dropout prevention, overall crime, juvenile arrests, and child abuse or neglect (Oregon Progress Board, 1999). Perhaps increasing the use of research-based alternative education strategies would improve these conditions. The term "alternative education" refers to nontraditional education services, ranging from separate schools for students who have been expelled to unique classes offered in a general education school building. Although the phrase might refer to any type of program that differs from traditional public schooling, it is commonly used in reference to programs designed for youth with challenging behavior (NASBE, 1994). Separate alternative schools may be designed for specific populations, such as dropouts from traditional high schools or youth who have been expelled for bringing a weapon or illegal drugs to school. In Oregon, " 'alternative education program' means a school or separate class group designed to assist students to achieve the goals of the curriculum in a manner consistent with their learning styles and needs . . . [in] learning situations that are flexible with regard to environment, time, structure and pedagogy (ORS 336.615, 336.625; see http://landru.leg.state.or.us/ors.336.html)."

In the past, alternative education has focused on high school-age adolescents but now is increasingly extended to younger students, for several reasons. First, in recent years it has become more common than in the past for young students to act out in ways that are dangerous. In the nation, at the beginning of the nineties, about 450,000 delinquent youths were placed in detention centers or training schools each year and another 300,000 sent to adult jails (Leone, Rutherford, & Nelson 1991). Rates of arrests for young offenders (e.g., preteens and early adolescents) have increased since then, especially for violence related to weapons (Butts & Synder, 1997). Violent crimes began to decline in 1994, but the overall level of these crimes remains unacceptably high. Violence perpetrated by very young offenders continues to be unusually high, which does not bode well for the future (*Declining Violence*, 1998). Concerns about the human and financial costs of incarceration of juveniles has led many to the conclusion that schools and other community agencies must increase efforts to develop alternative education programs and services (Dryfoos, 1997; Howell, 1995; Walker et al., 1996).

Second, increasing interest in serving children is a logical outcome of the findings of longitudinal research on the development of antisocial behavior patterns (see Loeber & Farrington, 1998; Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Tremblay et al., 1992) which clearly reveals developmental trajectories starting in early childhood. Wasserman and Miller (1998) point out that "Most serious violent offenders have a history characterized by earlier childhood misbehavior." Early intervention programs for children are more likely to change behavior than later rehabilitation programs for adolescents or adults (Walker & Bullis, 1995; Walker, Stieber, & Bullis, 1997; Walker & Sylwester, 1991). Grade 6 has been identified as a critical time to initiate dropout prevention efforts (Roderick, 1993).

Third, the current trends of (a) under identification (and late identification) of students with emotional and behavior disorders, especially those who also have discipline problems (Duncan, Forness, & Hartsough, 1995; Forness, Kavale, MacMillan, Asarnow, & Duncan, 1996; Kauffman, 1997; Tobin & Sugai, 1999a, 1999b) and (b) inclusion of special education students in general education classes rather than using a full continuum of placements (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1997; MacMillan, Gresham, & Forness, 1996) have resulted in an increased need for interim and permanent alternative placements (Katsiyannis & Maag, 1998).

Special Education Students in Need of Alternative Education

With publication of final regulations for 1997 federal IDEA Amendments comes increasing pressure to develop and use alternative education strategies for students who fail to adjust to the demands of general education settings. A new Sec. 300.519

addresses change of placement for disciplinary removals and makes it clear that after a child with a disability has been removed from his or her current placement for more than ten school days in the same school year the public agency must provide services to the extent necessary under Sec. 300.121(d) during any subsequent days of removal. In addition, the days when a student with challenging behavior is "sent home" without being formally "suspended" will now be included in the ten days. Sec. 300.520(b) has been revised to replace the word "suspension" with "removal" (*Rules and Regulations*, 1999). Other highlights include:

- Proposed Sec. 300.522 has been amended to (1) specify that the interim alternative educational setting referred to in Sec. 300.520(a)(2) must be determined by the IEP team and (2) clarifies that the services and modifications to address the child's behavior are designed to prevent the behavior from recurring.

- Proposed Sec. 300.526(c)(3) has been revised to allow repeated extensions of forty-five day removals by a hearing officer when returning the child to current placement would be dangerous.

- Proposed Sec. 300.527 (Protections for children not yet eligible for special education and related services) has been amended as follows: (1) Proposed Sec. 300.527(b)(1) has been revised to refer to not knowing how to write rather than illiteracy in English. (2) Proposed Sec. 300.527(b)(2) has been revised to clarify that the behavior or performance is in relation to the categories of disability identified in Sec. 300.7. (3) Proposed Sec. 300.527(b)(4) has been revised to refer to other personnel who have responsibilities for child find or special education referrals in the agency.

- Proposed Sec. 300.125 (Child find) has been revised to clarify that the child find requirements apply to highly mobile children (e.g., migrant and homeless children) and to children who are advancing from grade to grade even though suspected of having a disability.

(*Rules and Regulations*, 1999)

General Education Students in Need of Alternative Education

Students in special education who are removed from school yet provided with educational services elsewhere are not the only ones in need of alternative education strategies. Others with this need include students in general education who are having difficulty adjusting to school. The seriousness of school difficulties for adolescents is apparent in the fact that school-related problems were cited by one in five adolescents who attempted suicide in Oregon in 1996 (Center for Health Statistics, 1999). Gottfredson and Gottfredson (1985) note that "Substantial evidence implies that it is youths who do not do well in school who most often drop out early and who engage in more delinquent behavior." If successful, alternative education strategies that improve school adjustment would benefit both society and students at risk for drop out according to Altemnbaugh, Engel, & Martin (1995). "The benefits of drop-out prevention would exceed the costs by a ratio of nine to one" (p. 170). We review below common characteristics of alternative education programs.

Alternative Education Program Characteristics

Alternative education programs have widely different philosophies, organizational structures, and goals for students. Most are likely formed as a function of local needs, funding, politics, and school culture. Students may attend by choice, referral, or requirement. Settings may be a separate site, "school within a school," or self-contained classroom.

REASON FOR ADMISSION OR ATTENDANCE

Choice of admission may be offered in cases where the program is designed to address poor student-school match. The goals of the program would be to make school interesting and engaging for students. Presumably, attending by choice indicates student motivation to improve. Students who are referred or required to attend an alternative program would likely be referred for specific academic and/or behavioral problems. Placement may be short or long, and a typical goal is to return the student to the general education program. We would predict poorer overall outcome for these types of programs because of required attendance and multiple risk factors present in program youth.

PROGRAM LOCATION

Alternative education programs are found in three major types of settings. First, the school may be in a separate building, either as a continuation school that provides flexible attendance hours and course offerings or a special setting for youth with dangerous behavior or who are suspended or expelled for displaying dangerous or illegal behavior. Second, there are "schools within schools" that serve youth on a regular school campus but may use special teachers or even separate administrative staff. Third are alternative classrooms within the school. These may be fully self-contained or may attempt to allow students to participate at least part day in the general education program.

To date, there is no research comparing the relative efficacy of these different types of programs (Kochhar, 1998). While this is unfortunate, we believe that a number of research-based and research-validated strategies, when combined, provide a framework for an exemplary alternative education program. We review this best practice here.

Descriptions of Research-Based Alternative Education Strategies

The table on the following page provides an overview of best and preferred practice in education of at-risk students.

LOW RATIO OF STUDENTS TO TEACHERS

A small class size means teachers and staff have more time for each student, which may improve bonding and student commitment to school. While the debate about the value of smaller classes in general education for typically developing students continues, there is no doubt that smaller classes are better for students with emotional, social, or behavior problems. Stockard and Mayberry (1992) reported that students who were not able to cope with the variety and multiple transitions involved in a typical large middle school would do very well in a "school within a school" setting. Dryfoos (1990) also described an educational program based on this type of alternative programming that reported behavioral gains that lasted over time for the treatment group. Class size should be small enough for "substantial opportunities for informal adult-student interactions, where teachers are committed to and interested in working with students, and where students are perusing similar courses of academic study within an environment that is safe and orderly" (Altenbaugh et al., 1995, p. 184). Wasserman and Miller (1998) provide description of an effective alternative program for students with discipline problems in middle school:

> *In a program in Baltimore, children in seventh through eighth grade with a history of multiple suspensions were assigned to a special classroom during their school day (Safer, 1996). Academic instruction took place in special small classes (ten to fifteen students), and points for good behavior in class, via a token economy, could be applied to acquisition of various privileges, including a shortened school day . . . after program completion, intervention students were significantly more likely to enter high school, and to have higher attendance rates and better classroom behavior while there (p. 206).*

Maintaining a low ratio of students to teachers makes it possible to implement programs like *Check and Connect* (Evelo, Sinclair, Hurley, Christenson, & Thurlow, 1996). This program establishes daily, personal contact between an adult at school and a student in need of support, and the program has been shown to reduce dramatically the risk of dropout and delinquency. The adult functions as a mentor, tutor, advocate, and advisor.

HIGHLY STRUCTURED CLASSROOM WITH BEHAVIORAL CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Lipsey and Wilson (1998) found that behavioral programs have consistent "positive effects" on noninstitutionalized juvenile offenders (p. 332). Students who were not able to manage their own behavior well enough to succeed in general education were referred to highly structured classrooms for behavioral support. Students learned self-control with the help of a level system. At the first level, alternative educators provided the greatest amount of structure and control. Gradually, prompting and reinforcing were faded. Students can be taught self-management skills that will maintain (DuPaul & Hoff, 1998; Kim & Sugai, 1995; Todd, Horner, & Sugai, in press) as indicated by the Franklin-Jefferson Program (Schloss, Holt, Mulvaney, & Green, 1988). Behavior control was gained by providing three fifteen-minute breaks and recreational activities that could be gained or lost through a point system. The staff monitored their own behavior by holding daily, after-school team meetings to see that the point system was applied consistently. Students in the program made high academic gains, and many were able to move to less restrictive settings.

POSITIVE RATHER THAN PUNITIVE EMPHASIS IN BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

In general education settings, Mayer (1995) has demonstrated the value of using positive reinforcement, praising for constructive classroom behavior with group rewards, clarifying classroom rules, and providing additional rewards for compliance. Wasserman and Miller (1998) report, "In intervention schools, yearly vandalism costs decreased, whereas costs in control schools actually increased" (p. 205). However, negative consequences remain the standard approach to management of student behavior in schools across the country (Bear, 1998). In an alternative education placement, positive rather than punitive behavior management can be increased beyond what is accepted in a traditional education setting and then gradually faded in preparation for reintegration after students learn prosocial responses and attitudes.

For very young children, *First Step to Success* (Golly, Stiller, & Walker, 1998; Walker et al., 1997, 1998) is an alternative education strategy for very young students that emphasizes positive behavioral support in an integrated setting. Students receive positive reinforcement for compliance to teacher requests and for remaining on task. They also receive direct instruction in important social skills. *First Step to Success* also has a parent training component and has been shown to virtually eliminate maladaptive behaviors and increase academic behaviors in at-risk kindergartners and first graders.

The "Day Treatment Model" was an adaptation of the Achievement Place Model (Hicks & Munger, 1990). Emphasis was placed on reducing inappropriate behavior by teaching and positively reinforcing appropriate behavior. Teachers tried to maintain a ratio of three positive consequences for every negative consequence. To achieve this ratio, teachers had to pay attention to both the student's appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. Better grades, a decrease in problem behaviors at home, and a sixty-five percent decrease in police and court contacts were reported as positive gains made by students in this program.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH-BASED ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION STRATEGIES

LOW RATIO OF STUDENTS TO TEACHERS

- more personal time for each student
- better behavioral gains
- higher quality of instruction

HIGHLY STRUCTURED CLASSROOM WITH BEHAVIORAL CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

- level systems provide predictable structure
- self-management skills are taught
- high rates of positive reinforcement
- high academic gains
- students are able to move to less restrictive settings

POSITIVE RATHER THAN PUNITIVE EMPHASIS IN BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

- rewards for acceptable behavior and compliance
- classroom rules are clear and directly taught
- initial rich reinforcement "fades" to normal levels when possible (four positives to one negative)

ADULT MENTORS AT THE SCHOOL

- mentor must use positive reinforcement
- mentor takes special interest in child
- mentor tracks behavior, attendance, attitude, grades
- mentor negotiates alternatives to suspension and expulsion

INDIVIDUALIZED BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS BASED ON FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENT

- identify causes of the behavior
- identify what "keeps it going"
- identify positive behaviors to replace problems
- interview and involve the student
- use multicomponent interventions

SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION

- problem solving
- conflict resolution
- anger management
- empathy for others

HIGH-QUALITY ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION

- direct instruction and learning strategies
- control for difficulty of instruction
- small, interactive groups
- directed responses and questioning of students

Bry (1982, cited in Wasserman & Miller, 1998) reported an effective behaviorally based group program for seventh graders with academic or discipline problems, using random assignment to intervention or comparison. The intervention included opportunities to earn points toward field trips, based on positive teacher ratings and class attendance. "One year post-intervention, in blind follow-up assessments, intervention youth were significantly less likely to have school-based academic and discipline problems, based on school records, and the intervention youth themselves reported fewer delinquent activities. Five years postintervention, significantly fewer of the intervention youth, compared to controls, had county court criminal records" (Wasserman & Miller, 1998, p. 204; see also pp. 253-254 for further discussion of Bry's research).

ADULT MENTORS AT SCHOOL

Bry's intervention, in addition to using positive behavioral support, had a mentoring component. According to Catalano et al. (1998), research supports mentoring only if mentors are trained to use behavior management and provide positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior (e.g., attending school). Vance, Fernandes, and Biber (1998) report that an adult mentor at school (as opposed to in the community) is a significant protective factor for youth with aggressive behavior or emotional and behavioral disturbance: "Promoting a school setting that emphasizes finding each high-risk child an adult mentor who can reach out and take a special interest in that child, may go a long way toward enhancing educational progress" (p. 220). Although not all children in need of alternative education are aggressive or have emotional disabilities, many do have these problems. More research is needed on mentoring, which has been found helpful for children with a variety of characteristics and in a variety of settings (Sinclair et al., 1998; Tierney, Grossman, & Resch, 1995, cited in Vance et al., 1998).

INDIVIDUALIZED BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTIONS BASED ON FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORAL ASSESSMENTS

Individualized interventions based on behavioral functional assessments are mandated by IDEA 1997 for students with disabilities whose discipline problems have reached the point of needing alternative education placement. Any student in need of an alternative education program because of behavior problems, whether in special education or general education, may benefit from functional assessments used to design behavioral supports.

While students' antisocial and coercive or manipulative responses to directions, social situations, and task demands may be learned at home and generalized to school (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Snyder, Schrepferman, & St. Peter, 1997; Walker, Stieber, Ramsey, & O'Neill, 1991). Problems in the family or community should not be used as an excuse for failing to intervene in education settings. The school can make a unique contribution to the amelioration of behavior problems (Reid, 1993). At school, especially in an alternative setting, students can learn prosocial ways to interact with different adults and peers. In order to design successful instruction in social behaviors, however, the focus of the problem analysis must move from the child's family background to a functional assessment of the problem behavior as it occurs in the education setting. The program must identify what causes and maintains the problem behavior as well as prosocial behaviors to replace problematic patterns of behavior.

Reports of successful use of functional assessments of behavior problems in education settings to develop interventions are encouraging (Dunlap et al., 1993; DuPaul, Eckert, & McGoey, 1997; Egan, Zlomke, & Bush, 1993; Kern, Childs, Dunlap, Clarke, & Falk, 1994; Lalli, Browder, Mace, & Brown, 1993; Lewis & Sugai, 1996a, 1996b; Sprague & Horner, in press; Tobin, 1994; Umbreit, 1995).

O'Neill, Horner, Albin, Storey, Sprague, and Newton (1997) have developed an excellent book explaining the process of conducting a functional assessment that leads to a behavior support plan that will (a) replace the problem behavior with an alternative behavior that meets the same function for the student as the problem behavior but is more socially acceptable and (b) increase appropriate behavior. In addition, forms to document the process are provided.

Student interviews should be part of the functional assessment for those who are able to reporting the environmental circumstances of their challenging and preferred behaviors. Several standard forms for semi-structured student interviews are available to use in school settings (Kern, Dunlap, Clarke, & Childs, 1994; Reed, Thomas, Sprague, & Horner, 1996). If the student's problem is not attending school (or the alternative placement) regularly, school staff may resolve the attendance problem by using *The School Refusal Assessment Scale*. This scale uses teacher, parent, and student interviews with documented treatment validity to develop behavior support plans that match the functions of problem behaviors with replacement behaviors (Kearney & Silverman, 1993; Kearney & Tillotson, 1998).

Horner and Carr (1996) recommended combining functional assessment with comprehensive interventions. Functional assessments help develop wraparound interventions when school staff collaborate with community agencies and parents to develop plans for individualized services (Burchard & Bruns, 1998; Eber, Nelson, & Myles, 1997; Sprague, Sugai, & Walker, 1998).

SOCIAL SKILLS INSTRUCTION

Social skills instruction is a critical alternative education strategy. Social skills deficits in school predict future delinquency (Walker, Stieber, & Bullis, 1998) and poor vocational outcomes. Depending on the individual student's need, content in social skills instruction will vary but might include (a) interpersonal problem solving (Kazdin, Siegel, & Bass, 1992), (b) conflict resolution (Johnson & Johnson, 1997), (c) anger management (Lochman, Coie, Underwood, & Terry, 1993), (d) vocational social skills assessment and instruction (Bullis, Bull, Johnson, & Johnson, 1994; Bullis & Davis, 1996; Clement-Heist, Seigel, & Gaylord-Ross, 1992), and/or (e) social skills needed to replace aggressive behaviors (Goldstein & Glick, 1994; cited in Howell, 1998; Knapczyk, 1992). Lipsey and Wilson (1998) reported that for noninstitutionalized juvenile offenders, interpersonal skills training had the greatest "equated effect size" (.49) (p. 324), of all the treatments they reviewed. For institutionalized juveniles, interpersonal skills training was second only to "behavioral program" (p. 328) and both had an effect size over .40 in reducing recidivism.

In terms of instructional style, social skills are often learned in small group settings with materials and lessons developed by the teacher. However, published materials that can be adapted to large or small groups are available (e.g., Jackson, Jackson, & Monroe, 1983; McGinnis, Goldstein, Sprafkin, & Gershaw, 1984; Walker et al., 1983; Walker, Todis, Holmes, & Horton, 1988).

Second Step® is a promising, multicomponent curriculum providing systematic instruction in interpersonal skills such as empathy, anger management, and conflict resolution that can be used in both traditional and alternative educational settings. Grossman et al. (1997; see also Green et al., 1997 for further explanation of the study in response to a critical letter to the editor) used six matched pairs of urban and suburban elementary schools randomly assigned to intervention or comparison conditions. Students in the intervention group were taught the *Second Step*® curriculum two to three times per week over a twelve-week period. Using a structured protocol, trained, blind observers found that in unstructured settings at school (e.g., playground, cafeteria) students in the intervention group decreased physically aggressive behavior and increased neutral and prosocial behaviors ($p < .05$). A three-year longitudinal study is currently underway, and many pilot studies are highly encouraging (*Center for the Study & Prevention of Violence*, 1996a, 1996b; Sylvester & Frey, 1994).

The need to design instruction differently for the different phases of learning (e.g., acquisition, fluency, generalization) has long been recognized (Baer, Wolf, & Risley, 1968). It is especially important to promote use of social skills beyond the classroom. The need for more attention to programming for generalization continues and is no where more important than in alternative education settings, because students transition out of these settings. Transition planning is essential (Doren, Bullis, & Benz, 1996; Walker, 1995). Scott and Nelson recommend generalization strategies that "emphasize altering student response variables (e.g., teaching functional replacement behaviors, schedule thinning) and strategies that directly alter generalization settings (e.g., group contingencies, peer coaches)" (p. 269).

EFFECTIVE ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION

As mentioned earlier, a low student-to-teacher ratio is a key aspect of alternative education. Many of the students in alternative education will need extra academic support. It would not be unusual to find that many have learning disabilities or other special needs. Swanson and Hoskyn (1998) conducted a meta-analysis of outcomes in one hundred eighty experimental studies and determined that the following instructional features are most successful for students with learning disabilities across all subject areas: (a) combining direct instruction and strategy instruction, (b) controlling task difficulty and number of steps, (c) using small interactive groups, and (d) using directed responses and questioning of students.

Even students who are not characterized as having a disability of any kind may have fallen behind academically or may not be achieving optimally if they have difficulty adjusting to traditional education. Sometimes social behaviors interfere with learning, and when these are brought under control, the student is able to catch up if given time and direction. Mobility is a serious threat to academic achievement, and many students in need of alternative education have transferred frequently from one school to another. When students transfer into a school and their records are not available, it may be wise to take time for assessments, as "wise placement decisions from the beginning ease the transition" (Beck, Kratzer, & Isken, 1997, p. 354). Tutoring, even when provided in a "pull-out" model, is an effective strategy for helping transfer students be successful academically (Jason et al., 1992). If possible, family members should be trained to provide additional tutoring.

INVOLVING PARENTS

School-based parent training can have a positive effect on both parents and students. In a controlled study, an eleven-week intervention (meeting once a week for two hours) using the Aware Parenting Model with parents of fifth-grade students produced both academic and behavioral gains for these students in sixth grade (Bornstein et al., 1998). This model is based on the philosophy that the parent trainer should model nurturing behaviors desired by being attentive first to the parents' concerns and needs and then address expectations for the parents to do more for their children. The five components of the model are (a) support, (b) attentiveness, (c) responsive-

ness, (d) guidance, and (e) receptivity to emotion. Bornstein et al. (1998) noted that "facilitators offered support by encouraging parents and complimenting them, both for sharing ideas and experiences and for trying out new approaches within the group and at home" (p. 138).

If school-based parent training is not feasible, staff in alternative education programs might coordinate with and refer parents to parent-training programs offered by other professionals. Effective parent-training programs offered by psychologists that are aimed at the prevention of juvenile delinquency have emphasized increasing positive interactions and parental involvement in the child's education, as well as more active supervision of the child's free time (Patterson, Reid, & Dishion, 1992; Walker et al., 1995).

Establishing an Alternative Education Program

We conclude with a brief discussion of the steps to take when establishing a new alternative education program: (a) identify students in need of alternative strategies, (b) design the program carefully to avoid iatrogenic (negative) effects, (c) obtain support and implement, and (d) evaluate. We review these key steps and then describe how they are put together in one alternative "school within a school."

Identification of Students in Need of Alternative Strategies: Who is Appropriate?

Universal, Proactive Screening

Universal screening for emotional, behavioral, and interpersonal problems should be done when children first start school (Walker, Severson, & Feil, 1994) and repeated at regular intervals (e.g., October and March of each year) (Walker & McConnell, 1988; Walker & Severson, 1992). Students referred for special education who do not qualify should also be considered candidates for alternative education. In addition, special education students who are suspended or expelled for weapon or drug offenses must be provided educational services (IDEA, 1997) as discussed earlier in this paper.

School Records of Discipline Problems

Discipline referrals are warning signs of more serious problems likely to occur in the next few years (Tobin & Sugai, 1999b; Walker, Stieber, Ramsey, & O'Neill, 1991, 1993). Rather than wait for these problems to develop into a crisis or allow students to drift into patterns of alienation, educators should take preventive actions quick in response to warning signs. Students with discipline problems that do not respond favorably and quickly to traditional school consequences should not be allowed to continue, because the problems are a serious threat to the child's education. Not only is academic engaged time lost because of the child's initial misbehavior, more time is lost when the student is sent to the office and/or suspended. In general, students (a) who have referral and suspension rates much greater than other students or (b) who have not been referred often but have been referred for violence should be identified as candidates for alternative education. School records could be reviewed and summarized on the School Archival Records Survey (SARS) (Walker, Block-Pedego, et al., 1991). We have used this tool in our research and demonstration work to identify students in need of additional services.

Chronic Victims

In addition to identifying students with disruptive behavior problems in school records, chronic victims' names are also generally recorded in reports of bullying or harassment. According to Hodges and Perry (1996), "about ten percent of schoolchildren are chronically abused by peers. Victimization is highly stable over the school years and is associated with a wide variety of negative outcomes for the child, including depression, low self-esteem, and avoidance of school" (p. 23). Hodges and Perry go on to suggest providing social skills instruction in areas such as assertiveness and making friends. Doren, Bullis, and Benz (1996) found that victimization while in school predicts victimization post school, and they also suggest that social skills instruction may help prevent victimization. In particular, Doren et al. found a need to teach students with emotional and behavioral disorders how to act in community settings to avoid being victimizated. A study of self-reports of four hundred seventy-four children in third through sixth grade indicated that chronic victims are likely to have "social-psychological adjustment difficulties" (Crick and Grotpeter, 1996, p. 367). According to Day (1996), teaching children to "assert themselves with-out verbal or physical violence" (p. 84) would help children avoid being either victims or bullies, and providing victims at school with "counseling, support, and protection [is important] so that the desire for revenge does not fuel more violence" (p. 92).

Avoiding Iatrogenic (Negative) Effects

Whenever individuals are identified for prevention or treatment interventions, including alternative education strategies, potential iatrogenic (negative) effects should be considered. The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) found that alternative education programs serving older students removed from school for disciplinary reasons may be considered stigmatizing (NASBE, 1994). Hayward and Tallmadge (1995) point out that trade-offs are involved in the provision of any special service. Educators need to design alternative programs so that the advantages in the long run outweigh the disadvantages of the student being identified for intervention. Educators must learn from reports of programs for the student that not only failed to achieve idealistic goals but actually made things worse, in spite of good intentions.

A number of studies have reported on the causes of iatrogenic effects. Kazdin (1994) states that group programs in which children come into contact with "deviant peers" (p. 357) are most likely to produce unfavorable results with children in need of a preventive intervention whose initial problems were not severe. Such programs are most likely to help children in need of remediation who had severe problems. This confirms Reid's (1991) point that programs that work well as remedies for existing problems are not necessarily effective as prevention programs: "We often take clinical or educational intervention strategies that have been developed without prevention in mind, and work backwards to try to justify their use within our theoretical framework" (p. 870).

As for the influence of peers, Kazdin (1994) states that "more active use of non-antisocial peers in the treatment process (e.g., as therapeutic change agents . . .) would follow from current research" (p. 371). However, Guerra, Tolan, & Hammond (1994) warn that not only may a group intervention "have an adverse effect" on the students it was intended to help, "the students selected as role models" may be adversely affected (pp. 391-392). These authors recommend avoiding a "general group discussion or group therapy format" (p. 392). Reid (1991) recommends that participants in any preventive program be screened to "reduce the possibility of iatrogenic effects by offering services only to those youngsters and their families who actually demonstrate problems or deficits in areas targeted by the intervention procedures" (p. 867).

OBTAIN SUPPORT, IMPLEMENT, AND EVALUATE

Alternative education strategies need to be supported by school administrators and local communities. Although an individual teacher in a general education classroom could use some of the strategies discussed above, as long as the traditional school culture dominates the delivery system, it will be difficult to fully implement an alternative strategy. As the name implies, alternative education should be systematically different from traditional education. Although there will be additional costs involved in any sincere effort to provide alternative education, it should be remembered that a range of options exists, some less expensive than others. For example, paraprofessionals can be exemplary mentors and tutors with minimal direction from certified staff, and many students could benefit from being in an alternative classroom part of the day and a traditional classroom the remainder of the day.

Conclusion

We have reviewed a variety of issues related to the need for alternative education, differing models of service delivery, and research-based practices recommended for those programs. Given the number of students who are dropping out of or being expelled from traditional educational settings, the need for alternative education programs is clear. Service delivery systems vary in terms of location, admissions, and ages served. Although more research is needed on types of delivery systems, specific strategies with a strong research base can be recommended for alternative educational programs in any setting. These include (a) small class size; (b) highly structured classroom management; (c) positive rather than punitive behavior management; (d) adult mentors at school; (e) interventions based on functional assessment for students with serious behavior problems; (f) social skills instruction, especially in the areas of empathy, anger management, and conflict resolution; (g) instructional strategies that will help students catch up who have fallen behind academically, including tutoring, direct instruction, and strategy instruction; and (h) parent training programs that provide support for parents before urging parents to do more for their children.

Alternative education programs should be supported by the entire community. Traditional schools serve most students well, and many administrators feel pressure to maintain standard programs for this reason. In fact, it may seem that the traditional school is more orderly if disruptive students or those who do not "fit in" either leave voluntarily by dropping out or are removed by expulsion, homebound placements, or other segregated special educational settings. When this happens, however, it is the community that suffers as the displaced youth attempt to find their place in a society without adequate preparation. Alternative education programs have already helped many youth and hold promise for the future if they are expanded creatively.

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